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PROVINCE IX EXPLORES  
EDUCATION APPROACHES

PANAMA CITY, Panama -- Bishops, priests and lay people of Central America met here in late spring to explore the role of Christian education in the context of the diverse and changing needs of the Episcopal Church in the region.

A greater focus on Christian education -- a key goal of the Province IX Partners in Mission consultation -- has been underway for some time and was given a strong impetus at this meeting by the participation of nearly all the bishops of the province and of Costa Rica.

The 50 participants struggled with efforts to identify approaches that would build authentic Christian community reflecting the historical, cultural and theological background of the people.

Two educators -- the Rev. John Westerhoff of Duke University and the Rev. Luis Reinoso, director of CELADEC (The Latin American Christian Education Commission) of Lima, Peru, made keynote presentations and then joined the workshops and discussions in which the concepts were shaped into concrete plans.

Westerhoff, in remarks on faith development, conversion and nurture, urged that the historical and cultural background, as well as the vision for the future, be the basis for developing an educational ministry. Reinoso, urging an analysis of the political and social context in which the Church ministers, pointed specifically to the questions of justice in the developing nations and the part that Churches have taken.

The major factor in working out these questions, according to the Rev. David W. Perry, Christian education coordinator of the Episcopal Church Center, was the way in which delegates were able to take part fully in the conversations. He noted that all participants were able to play a role in developing this ministry and in talking together about their common identity.

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That view was reflected by conference participants, one of whom noted: "The conference helped us to have a joint vision. When one is alone, one has a big frustration."

The dioceses and province will develop the work of the conference through the provincial task force on Christian education which met at the conclusion of the event.

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